

Historic, Archive Document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.

1. 4421
A2F53

BEFORE AND AFTER

A Play by Aileen Fisher About the Community School Lunch Program

CAST

Stage Manager
Helper
Mr. Finlay
Mrs. Finlay
Johnny Finlay

Bertha (12)
Agnes - (10)

Pete Swanson
Mrs. Swanson
Mrs. White
Bobby White
Mr. White

Scene

An empty stage. There is a wide white line down the middle that separates the stage into two equal parts, right and left.

Production Notes

Since few properties are needed, this play can be produced in any classroom, auditorium, clubroom, etc. A stage is not necessary. Children could play all the parts, impersonating grown-ups; or a combination of children and grown-ups could be used. Some characters might be "doubled up." Most of the stage "business," (eating at the table, packing lunches, etc.) should be in pantomime.

The play begins when the Stage Manager comes out before the audience with two large signs on standards. One sign reads BEFORE, and the other AFTER.

Washington 25, D. C.

January 1945

Reproduced by the War Food Administration

APR 10 1945

1000
011

STAGE MGR....(To audience) We're just about ready to begin now.

(He puts the BEFORE sign on the left of the stage from the audience point of view; and places the AFTER sign at the right of the stage. Then he turns to the audience, gesturing.)

Everything that happens on this side of the stage is BEFORE. Everything that happens on that side of the stage is AFTER.

HELPER.....(Coming in with chairs in time to hear the last words)
After what?

STAGE MGR....Don't you think they know?

HELPER.....You might as well tell them. You can never be sure.
(He moves in two small tables - card tables will do - and places one near each sign. Then he sets three chairs to the left, right, and rear of each table.)

STAGE MGR....(To audience) BEFORE means before school lunches.
AFTER means after school lunches. (To Helper)
Is everyone ready?

HELPER.....(Looking toward sidelines) I guess so.

STAGE MGR....O. K., then. Tell the Finlays to listen for their cue.
(Helper goes out.) Ladies and gentlemen, this ...
(he makes a gesture toward the BEFORE sign) is the Finlay dining room before there were school lunches. And this, ladies and gentlemen ... (indicates AFTER sign) is the Finlay dining room after Johnny began eating his noon meal in the school lunchroom.

(Mr. and Mrs. Finlay and Johnny come in, and sit at the table near the BEFORE sign. They make believe they are eating.)

The Finlays are in the midst of their dinner. It is a spring evening. The maple buds in the Iowa town where the Finlays live have not yet burst into leaf. (He nods and exits.) ... (If advisable, change this family name, State and season to fit the locality where the play is given.)

MRS. F......Johnny, you're not eating your vegetables again.

JOHNNY.....I don't like them.

MR. F......Come on, carrots are good for you. How can you ever expect to be President if you don't eat vegetables?

JOHNNY.....I don't like them.

MRS. F......If you knew how long it took me to wash those greens, you'd eat them out of pity, if for no other reason!

JOHNNY.....I don't like them.

MRS. F......(With a big sigh, to Mr. Finlay) What in the world are we going to do? He won't eat this, he won't eat that. He won't even taste things. He's underweight. He's not strong. He isn't doing well in school. What's the answer?

MR. F......I'll bite, Martha, I'll bite!

(The Stage Manager sticks his head in, gestures to the Finlays. They get up from the table and cross to the AFTER side of the room, where they sit down at the table.

STAGE MGR....(To the audience) I forgot to tell you. Every time anyone crosses that white line there, that means six months have passed. Now, you see, its autumn in Iowa where the Finlays live. The maple leaves have fallen from the trees, and it's pretty dark when the Finlays eat their dinner. They have to switch on the light. (He exits.)

JOHNNY.....Say, why don't we ever have carrots?

MRS. F......We've had them twice already this week.

JOHNNY.....Why can't we have them raw sometimes - cut into little sticks? That's the way we had them in our school lunch today.

MR. F......You mean you ate raw carrots?

JOHNNY.....Sure. Everybody eats everything at the school lunch.

MRS. F......Really?

JOHNNY.....Well, a fellow can't leave food on his plate when nobody else does. Anyway, carrots and things don't taste the way they used to.

MR. F.....You never used to taste them.

JOHNNY.....Aw - that was a long time ago. (Leans toward his father) Look. Feel my muscle!

MR. F.....Say, now. You're going to have a chance to be President, after all.

MRS. F.....He's gaining weight and he's stronger. He's been getting better marks, too. And I must say he's making things a lot easier for yours-truly, the cook. Thank heaven for the school-lunch program.

MR. F.....I don't think he used to get enough to eat.

MRS. F.....He wouldn't eat what he got. You remember. It was like fighting a world war to get him to eat vegetables.

JOHNNY.....Please pass the ammunition ... I mean, the greens!

(Stage manager comes in and nods to Finlays.)

STAGE MGR...Thank you very much: We have to move along to West Virginia now. Why don't you Finlays sit down there with the folks in the audience and listen to the rest of this?

(The Finlays go down and sit in the audience.)

STAGE MGR...Now we are in West Virginia, ladies and gentlemen.

HELPER.....(Coming in with the script in his hand. He looks at it.) We don't need the dining room scene for this, do we?

STAGE MGR...No. You can take out the tables and one of the chairs. We won't need the tables again until we get to Minnesota. (Helper removes table and chair from each side of the stage.) Ladies and gentlemen, Bertha and Agnes, who live in West Virginia, are sisters. (He beckons toward wings.) Come on in, girls.

(Bertha and Agnes enter, and sit on the two chairs still left at the BEFORE sign. Bertha has a small lunch box, which she holds on her lap.)

STAGE MGR....Their father works hard but doesn't always earn enough money to keep his family going. (Turns to the girls)
Well, what are you having for lunch today, girls?
(Exits.)

BERTHA.....What shall we eat today, Agnes?

AGNES.....Pot roast!

BERTHA.....No, we had that yesterday. Let's have meat balls today.

AGNES.....Meat balls ... and mashed potatoes! And let's have a little well of gravy in the middle of the potatoes.
I won't let mine run out till the very end, will you?

BERTHA.....Oh, no. I'll eat all around the well to keep the gravy in. And let's have muffins, nice and hot, with real butter.

AGNES.....Real butter? Honest?

BERTHA.....Sure. As real as you can make believe.

AGNES.....And tomatoes. Why don't we have tomatoes? And a glass of milk.

BERTHA.....Let's start now ... I'm so hungry, aren't you?

AGNES.....Mostly all the time I'm hungry, Bertha.

(Bertha takes the cover off the lunch box, and the girls look in.)

AGNES.....What is it?

BERTHA.....A sanwidge. Only there isn't any "widge."

AGNES.....Not any?

BERTHA.....Just a little lard in the middle of the bread.

(They each take a piece of the bread and eat.)

AGNES.....It doesn't taste much like pot roast and mashed potatoes, does it?

BERTHA.....Aw - you forgot. Yesterday was pot roast. Today it's meat balls.

AGNES.....I meant meat balls, only my tongue got mixed up.

BERTHA.....You can eat the middle of make-believe potatoes without the gravy running out!

AGNES.....(Looking at the lunch box.) Isn't there something else?

BERTHA.....Another sanwidge. Same kind. No widge.

AGNES.....(Sighing) Well, I guess that's something, even if it isn't pot roast.

BERTHA.....Meat balls, Agnes! Yesterday was pot roast. (Pause)

AGNES.....(Motioning to Stage Manager) Are you forgetting to tell us to move?

(Stage Manager sticks his head in. Bertha and Agnes cross over to the AFTER side of the stage and sit down.)

STAGE MGR...It's still West Virginia, ladies and gentlemen.
Six months AFTER.

AGNES.....(As if eating from a plate.) We never thought the make-believe would be real, did we, Bertha? Remember the pot roast and meat balls and mashed potatoes we didn't used to have before school lunches?

BERTHA.....They taste much better real.

AGNES.....Now everybody gets the same lunch ... and nobody knows how much anybody else pays ... and nobody is hungry any more, the way they used to be.

BERTHA.....That's because the Government helps. I wonder how the Government knew, don't you?

AGNES.....You mean about all the mashed potatoes that weren't mashed and weren't potatoes?

BERTHA.....Yes, and the gravy that wouldn't run because it wasn't.

AGNES.....I wonder. You know, Mary always used to say she had chocolate cake ... but she really didn't have anything to eat. Not even bread and lard.

BERTHA.....Oh, Agnes, quick ... look!

AGNES.....What?

BERTHA.....Your gravy ... it's running out of the mashed potato well!

AGNES.....(Laughing) I'm glad. I'm glad. That shows it isn't make-believe gravy any more!

(Bertha and Agnes go out. The Stage Manager and Helper come in.)

STAGE MGR...We'll need those tables again now. Minnesota is next.

HELPER.....O. K. Coming up. (Goes out, gets tables, and puts one by each sign.)

STAGE MGR...You are about to look in on the kitchen of Mr. and Mrs. Pete Swanson, ladies and gentlemen. The Swansons live on a farm in Minnesota. They have three children, but the children are still upstairs getting dressed for school. It is a spring morning. The wild cherry trees are in bloom in Minnesota. (He sniffs) You could smell them, if it weren't for that coffeepot on the stove.

(Mr. and Mrs. Swanson have come in while the Stage Manager was talking. Mrs. Swanson works at the table, packing lunches. Her husband sits on a chair and cuts up potatoes for the pigs. Stage Manager exits.)

PETE S.....I got to get the mash on for the pigs. Can you help me cut up some of these little spuds?

MRS. S.....I'm too busy. I'm always too busy. I got so much to do in the morning, I feel like a merry-go round. Breakfast to get. Three lunches to pack. Three children to get off to school. If I only didn't have to pack the lunches! They are the straw that breaks my back, Pete. It's not just warming the butter ... and spreading it on the bread. It's trying to think of something to put inside. (Sighs) I hope that School Lunch Program goes through. They serve lunches over at the Helwig Consolidated School, and it works fine. Just fine. Mrs. Lundstrom told me.

PETE S.....But the cost, Anna! Farmers aren't so rich. How can we pay out money for lunches every day for three kids?

MRS. S......You think the bread doesn't cost us anything? And the butter to spread on? And something to put inside? And my time? You think that's all nothing!

PETE S......Not nothing. But not as much as spending for three lunches every day.

MRS. S......If you kept figures, down in a book, the way you do with the cows and pigs, then you'd see, maybe. Besides, the Government pays part.

PETE S......How much part?

MRS. S......We had it at the club meeting. Nine cents the Government pays back on the complete school lunch. And there is the other thing for farmers, too.

PETE S......What other?

MRS. S......We had it at the club meeting. You know what happens when there are too many apples or potatoes or something. But now the Government buys up some of the food for the School Lunch Program.

PETE S......Ya? But farmers still don't have much cash to pay out for kids' lunches.

MRS. S......We had it at the meeting, too, about canning. If we put up fruits and vegetables in the summer together, we women, the cost of school lunches is not so much either.

PETE S......But I still think it is not for farmers, Anna. Town kids, maybe.

MRS. S......Every morning three lunches to pack! (Sighs heavily.)

STAGE MGR....(Coming in, nodding at the Swansons, who cross over to the AFTER side of the stage and sit at the table. It is autumn. The wild cherries have been picked in Minnesota now, that is, the ones the birds didn't get. When the Swansons get up in the morning the house is cold and the kitchen floor creaks. And there is frost on the barn roof ... only it is too dark to see it. (He sniffs.) You could smell November in the air if it weren't for that coffeepot on the stove. (Exits.)

MRS. S......I can help you with the pig mash, Pete. So nice, not to rush my head off in the mornings now. No more lunches to pack. No more warm the butter! Get out the bread! What to put inside? It is a good thing to have done with.

PETE S......Ya, it works out.

MRS. S......All that canning we did this summer for the school lunch. It saved things that would have gone to waste otherwise. And better for the children. I don't think I always packed them what was best to eat - with vitamins and so. And we had a good time, too, all of us canning together!

PETE S......I remember when the farmer had such big crops of potatoes that the Government helped out by buying some for the School Lunch Program. Ya, it works out.

MRS. S......The children like having something hot at noon. And not always the same bread and butter with something inside.

PETE S......Ya, it works out.

MRS. S......Mrs. Berg says her boy has gained 8 pounds with the school lunches. And he is better now, she says, at playing with the other children.

PETE S......He was the one afraid to eat with the others at first.

MRS. S......Bashful. Sitting off by himself always. But not any more, Mrs. Berg says. It was the school lunch got him to mix with the others.

PETE S......It works out.

(Mr. and Mrs. Swanson exit. Stage Manager comes in.)

STAGE MGR....(Calling to Helper) We'll need the third chair back again.

HELPER.....(Coming in with an extra chair for each side of the stage, and trying to read the script at the same time.)
Scene 4; dining room in California. (Puts down chairs.)

STAGE MGR....Tell the Whites to listen for their cue. (Helper exits.)
Ladies and gentlemen, we are now in California. It is a cold, wet evening in spring, which - by the way - is very unusual weather for California.

(Mr. White, Mrs. White, and Bobby come in and sit at the table near the BEFORE sign.)

STAGE MGR....The Whites are eating their dinner. (He exits.)

MRS. W......Bobby, you're not eating your vegetables again.

BOBBY......I don't like them.

MR. W......Come on, carrots are good for you. How can you ever expect to be President if you don't eat vegetables?

BOBBY......I don't like them.

MRS. W......If you knew how long it took me to wash those greens, you'd eat them out of pity, if for no other reason.

(There is a movement in the audience. A woman stands up. It is Mrs. Finlay.)

MRS. F......Just a moment, please!

(The Whites look at Mrs. Finlay questioningly. Stage manager comes hurrying in.)

STAGE MGR....What's the matter? (Looks around.)

MRS. F......I think there has been some mistake. The pages must have got mixed.

STAGE MGR....(Looking through his script) Mistake? No. That's right. That's just what it says here ... "you'd eat them out of pity, if for no other reason."

MRS. F......(Desperately) But those are my words. My very words.

MR. F......(Standing up in his place in the audience.) I agree with my wife. The Whites are saying our lines.

JOHNNY......(Standing up, too.) That's right. They sure are.

STAGE MGR....I'm sorry, but I don't know what we can do about it. As long as there is a BEFORE, this sort of thing is bound to go on and on, you know. A different State - Georgia, Michigan, Alabama, Washington ... one after the other. A different time of year. A different family - the Finlays, the Whites, the Thompsons, the Smiths. A different setting. But the same words, the same complaints, on and on, over and over.

MRS. F......Do you mean we'll have to sit here and listen to it all over again?

STAGE MGR....As long as there is a BEFORE, it'll go on and on, Mrs. Finlay. That's the way it is. And it is still BEFORE for 22 million school children! Only about 5 million get school lunches now.

MR. F......It's an outrage.

STAGE MGR....Sure it is!

MRS. F......Can't we do something about it? Can't we change it?

STAGE MGR....(Shrugging) How?

MR. W......(Standing up at the table) If I may make a suggestion ...

STAGE MGR....By all means.

MR. W......We've got to get rid of the BEFORE. Why can't someone take the sign away?

MRS. F......(Nodding vigorously) Why, yes - that would fix it.

STAGE MGR....Take away the BEFORE? Not have any more BEFORE? Why, that's a very good suggestion indeed. (Confidentially to the audience.) That's the whole point of this play, really - to get rid of BEFORE.

(He beckons to the Helper, who comes in and takes away the BEFORE sign. The Whites move over to the AFTER side of the stage. Helper removes chairs and table on the BEFORE side so the stage is bare there.)

MRS. F......(Happily) That's better!

STAGE MGR....There! I think it worked out pretty well.

BOBBY......(Standing near the AFTER sign.) Say! Now that we've changed what happened before, now that there isn't any before left, we can all live happily ever AFTER ... can't we? (He picks up the AFTER sign and the Whites move across the stage with it as the curtain goes down.)